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**District of Columbia Public Library**

**Board Of Trustees**

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**Bill 16-743, Library Transformation Act of 2006**

Testimony of

**John W. Hill. Jr.,  
President**

Before the  
Committee on Education, Libraries and Recreation  
The Honorable Kathy Patterson, Chairman  
Council of the District of Columbia

October 27, 2006

Room 412  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
1:00PM

Madame Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to address two specific issues: 1) the unsuitability of the Carnegie Library Building as the site for new central library for the city; and, 2) the updated estimates for construction costs issued by Dr. Gandhi, the Chief Financial Officer. My name is John W. Hill and I am the President of the Board of Library Trustees and CEO of the Federal City Council. My remarks are going to focus on a new central library building, on the old convention center site and its importance for the City and the financing plan for it. Betsy Kraft, another trustee will offer testimony in support of the Board's position and our fellow trustee, Richard Levy, will discuss the major roadblocks connected to any plan that would place the new central library in the Carnegie Building.

Our new Chief Librarian, Ginnie Cooper, has begun the task of transformation of the Library system and she will cover the progress to date in her remarks and with Jeff Bonvechio from the Capital Projects Office of the Library, present the case for the new building. We are also joined today by others on the Library staff to talk about the ways that the current building hampers their delivery of services to City residents.

At the hearing your committee held on the District of Columbia Public Library in June 2006, you heard compelling arguments from many witnesses about the importance of a new central library as part of the downtown renaissance. As that testimony is already a part of the record, I will not repeat it today, but I do want to emphasize several important points that were made.

The report of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force should be available in print any day now. The Task Force assessed the Library system's current strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to address critical needs of the community by transforming itself into a truly 21<sup>st</sup> century delivery system. Through 18 months of extensive research, field visits and consultation with Library staff, patrons and independent experts, the Task Force developed a comprehensive understanding of the DC Public Library system in relation to innovative library systems serving urban communities throughout the United States and Canada. The Task Force identified four fundamental challenges within the DC Public Library system. Briefly, the challenges include aging facilities, staff issues, substandard collections and a technology deficit. The Task Force recommends the renovation or replacement of existing branch libraries. The Task Force also recommends that in close coordination with the overhaul and revitalization of its branch libraries, the DC Public Library should replace the functionally obsolete Martin Luther King Jr., Memorial Library with an inspiring, state-of-the art facility.

The current central library building is 433,000 + square feet and it was designed and constructed before computers were a key tool in creating and delivering library services. We believe there is no efficient way to use the space; the brick walls are inflexible and inhibit space reallocation; our auditorium and some meeting rooms are buried in the bowels of the building; it is very difficult to install technology and appropriate lighting; and, the lack of proper heating and cooling are uncomfortable and the poor climate controls are destroying the District's valuable special collections, including the Washingtonian collection.

We need a new, vibrant building and we will present to you a coherent funding plan that combines city and federal funds with significant contributions from the private sector. I continue to meet with potential donors – individuals, corporations, and foundations and I am very confident, as is Mr. Tom Susman, the President of the DCPL Foundation, that private donations will match our vision for service. I am equally convinced that there is not that same excitement in the funding community about renovating the current central library building for continued use as a central library. You will be hearing from Mr. Susman later this afternoon.

The New Martin Luther King Jr., Memorial Library would be the focus of the use on our portion of the site at the old Convention Center. It would also be the only facility on the site open for use by all district residents. Like the libraries in Salt Lake City and Vancouver there will be some related retail space available. Like Nashville, we will have a small conference center for the use of the Library its partners and citizens.

We estimate that the new building will be 80 % of the size of the current building, but the total usable space will be larger than what we have in the current building. There has been some talk of placing limits on the retail space through legislation and the Library would not oppose such limits.

I want to reemphasize that in the funding model we present, the current library building would NOT be sold. While the pending registration on the National Register of Historic Buildings would place some limitations on future use, we know that there are organizations very interested in the building and that a long-term lease is preferred. In her presentation Ms. Cooper will show you the proposed financing model that includes lease revenue as a component. We intend to stay in the current building while the new library is under construction – in effect leasing it back for a few years. We think such an arrangement works to the benefit of the Library and the lesser as time will be needed to secure the appropriate permits for construction.

As President of the Board of Trustees, I want to thank the Mayor for his continued dedication to improving our library system. And, thank you, Madame Chairman, for your continued support of the library system. The committee's approval and the strong support of the City Council for this legislation are imperative for this project to move forward.